

A Stranger Christmas by Thegracefulnerd

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Multi

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Karen Wheeler, Steve Harrington

Relationships: Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Will Byers/ Original Character

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Summary:

It's Christmas time in Hawkins, Indiana, and everyone is celebrating in their own way.

1. Eleven Learns to Skate

Author's Note:

Another ST fic! Shocking, I know but I just adore writing for these guys!! I feel so close to these characters. Ironically, I started this series this time last year, and just now had the time to finish it! Anyway, please enjoy!

It was common knowledge that Winter in Hawkins meant snow and brutally cold temperatures. People would hide away in their homes, turning their thermostats as high as they would go and hide away under piles of blankets and old quilts. Eleven hated the cold. She loathed and detested it with every fiber of her being. Cold seemed to seep into her bones and freeze her from the inside out. Cold was the lab where she was poked and prodded and forced to wear a hospital gown and do things with her mind. Cold was being stuck out in the forest during a Hawkins winter two years ago, wandering aimlessly from day to day just trying to stay alive. Eleven truly, truly despised the cold.

So, when Mike came over to her new house that Joyce and Hopper bought a year after the mind flayer fiasco, asking Eleven to go ice skating with him she was hesitant. "Ice skating?" she asked. She had learned a lot of new things since Mike had found her in the pouring rain three years ago, but she'd never heard of 'ice skating'.

Mike, ever patient with her lack of knowledge quickly explained. "Yeah, when it gets really cold out the lakes and ponds freeze over and people go ice skating. You wear these special skates that are kinda sharp and pointy and it helps you glide on the ice."

Eleven wrinkled her nose. "It sounds cold."

"It's not that bad once you wear a lot of layers." Mike faltered at her clear hesitation to go out in the cold. "You don't have to come though, we can just stay in and watch movies if you want."

As tempting as a movie day sounded, Eleven was curious about 'ice

skating'. Hopper had been encouraging her to try new things and try to break out of her sheltered routine. So she looked outside at the thick snow blanketing the ground and back to the warm couch with her quilt and fuzzy robe Joyce had gotten her, and she nodded.

"No. I want to try ice skating. It sounds fun." Eleven told Mike.

He grinned and ushered Eleven back inside her house. "Go get ready, we don't have long before it get's dark."

Eleven nodded and ran through the hall to her room to get dressed. Her room was next to Will's, with Johnathan just across the hall. Joyce and Hopper were on the other side of the house. Her room was painted light blue with purple flowers painted at different intervals. Nancy and Joyce had done it as a surprise for Eleven's 13th birthday. They'd found out her birthday from the Hawkins Lab papers Hopper swiped from Dr. Owens.

Five minutes later Eleven turned the corner ready to go ice skating with Mike, although he could barely see her for all the layers she was wearing. She had on a pair of sweatpants, a thick wool sweater that he recognized as his, a knitted scarf and a knitted wool hat pulled down low over her ears. Mike grinned, "El are you in there?"

"I hate the cold." Was all she answered. Mike wrapped his arm around her shoulders and smiled.

"I know."

~

Eleven wasn't bad at ice skating. They'd gone to a pond a few miles away from the Byers' old house and Nancy had given El a pair of ice skates that she'd grown out of. Mike showed her how to lace them up and how to walk in them without breaking your ankle, and then he led her out on the ice. At first she had hesitated and kept a death grip on Mike's arm. She didn't like how slippery the ice felt under her. It was almost like she was weightless against the hard sheets of ice that covered the pond. She hated feeling weightless. She almost asked to go back in but then she looked around and saw other young couples her age skating and holding hands, an older couple had a young child

between them that was holding their hands and pulling them along.

"This is normal." Eleven stated bluntly.

"Yeah it is, but if you don't like it we don't have to-" Mike started but Eleven cut him off with a grin.

"I want to be normal. Come on, show me how to skate again." Eleven instructed happily. She couldn't help the fluttery feeling that happened in her stomach when Mike beamed down at her.

"Ok, so what you want to do is balance your weight on the front and back of your feet. And bend your knees, it helps keep your momentum. Push off with your right foot and then just glide." Mike explained. Eleven listened intently and then nodded. The first few tries were shaky, when she finally was confident enough to let go of Mike's hand she made it a few feet before she fell back onto the ice in a fit of giggles. Mike helped her up and she took his arm. They eventually fell into a steady rhythm and made it around the pond a few times. Someone was playing soft Christmas music from a boombox across the pond, and the sun was just starting to sink over the horizon. Snow started falling gently over the pond, littering Mike's black hair with little white flakes. Eleven thought it was endearing.

She eventually rested her head on Mike's arm, he was too tall for her to reach his shoulder while they were standing, and sighed happily. Last year Johnathan and Nancy hadn't been able to come home for Christmas and Joyce and Hopper had been in the middle of a move. They hadn't been able to have a real Christmas outside of friends coming over and watching Rudolph on ABC.

This was Eleven's first real Christmas, and she was thrilled beyond words.

"Are you getting cold?" Mike asked her. The sun was steadily sinking lower and lower and the snow was starting to fall a little harder.

"Yeah, can we go?" Eleven asked, suddenly the idea of being in the dark and in the cold made Eleven panic. She hated it. She just wanted to be in her warm house with Hopper's grilled cheese and a hot

chocolate. Mike helped her get off the ice and back over to where his bike was. They changed out of their skates and Eleven got on the back of the bike as she'd done so many times before.

It only took them about five minutes to get home but to Eleven it felt like a lifetime. The wind was biting at her face despite hiding her face behind Mike's hunched torso, and the snow was melting into her sweater and hair making her feel wet.

"We're here." Mike said. He dismounted his bike and Eleven followed suit. They rushed back into the house to see Joyce and Hopper in the kitchen laughing over their dinner plates. Will was still over at John's house, and Johnathan and Nancy were with Nancy's family. It was a rare quiet moment in the Hopper-Byers household. Eleven loved it.

"Hey sweetie, hey Mike." Joyce called. Joyce had happily taken on the role of Eleven's mother figure. Hopper was a great dad, but Eleven still needed a female influence. Karen, Nancy, Joyce and Max often spent time together when the boys were becoming too much to handle. Eleven loved having a mother in her life. It made her feel almost complete, like her family was finally pulling together.

"You have fun kid?" Hopper asked. Eleven nodded.

"Yes, but it was cold." Eleven explained. She took off her scarf and hat and sat them down on the coffee table. "I'm going to go change." she told Mike. Then she took off towards her room.

Once she'd changed into a pair of warm pajamas and Hopper had made extra grilled cheeses for her and Mike she settled on the couch beside Mike and turned the TV channels.

"What do you wanna watch?" She asked Mike.

"I don't mind. I think the Grinch is on ABC again." Mike told her. She flipped the channel over to ABC with a thought and then settled back into her place with Mike. She was cuddled into his side with his arm draped over her shoulder holding her close to him. Her head rested on his shoulder and he rested his head on hers.

"Are you still cold?" Mike asked.

She shook her head. "No, I'm fine now."

Hopper brought them grilled cheeses and Joyce followed closely behind with two cups of hot chocolate. "Mike honey I called your mom, it's dark out and the snow has started falling heavy. You can stay here tonight." Joyce told them. Eleven beamed up at Mike, thrilled that he was going to get to stay with her.

Hopper grunted, "Don't make me regret not buying a house with a guest room, Wheeler."

Eleven looked at Mike confused about what Hopper was saying but Mike looked like he'd seen the demogorgon. "Of course sir."

Joyce laughed and hit Hopper on the arm, "Relax, they're just kids Hop." Hopper just grunted in response.

They walked back into the kitchen, probably to share a cigarette and Eleven turned back to the TV. The Grinch was currently dressed as Santa Clause and was stealing all of the decorations from the Whos from Whoville. Eleven giggled at the silly parts of the show and Mike looked down at her, way more interested in her than the show.

Eventually, the Grinch ended and Joyce and Hopper had gone to bed. The snow was falling in thick torrents now, the large white flakes illuminated by the porch light. Eleven felt peace settle over her like Mike's wool sweater. She was warm, she was safe, and she was loved. She turned to tell Mike something, but he had fallen asleep beside her. El grinned and patted his head affectionately. She settled back into the couch, her blanket draped over the both of them. Sleep came easily, and Eleven wasn't cold the entire night.

2. Joyce Buys Lights (again)

Joyce Byers had a love/hate relationship with Christmas lights. She loved the way that their soft light illuminated her dark living room. She loved seeing her Christmas tree, all lit up with presents stacked underneath. She loved getting the age-old boxes out of the shed and decorating with all the kids. But she also hated the memories. The memories of Will communicating with her through the lights. The memories of the looks she was given from the people who thought she was crazy. Those memories surfaced again when Hopper asked her about buying new Christmas decorations.

“New house, new start, maybe we could get some new stuff. You know, take the kids to go get a tree, do the whole family-Christmas thing.” He’d suggested.

“Really? You think so?”

Hopper shrugged, “Come on it’ll be fun. Look, you and the kids pick out the decorations and I’ll get the tree on my way home. We’ll all decorate tonight. Sing Christmas songs, watch old movies, we can even dance on the back porch like we used to do.”

Joyce grinned, “Hop, I think that’s a wonderful idea.”

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Now, Joyce, Will, El, and Jonathan were at Melvald’s picking out different things to decorate the house with. El and Will decided they were going to pick up everything in the store, and Jonathan was just trying to do whatever he could to make Joyce’s life easier.

“Mom, do you need ornaments?”

“Probably.”

“Mom! Mom! Look they have snowman cookie cutters!”

“I see that.”

“Joyce, everything is so glittery.”

“That’s Christmas, sweetie.”

Joyce eventually was able to pry El and Will away from the decorations and make it to the lights. She stared at the colorful boxes and felt a cold chill settle over her. Just three years ago she’d been in this same store, buying the same lights. She didn’t know if she’d ever see her son again, her boss had thought she’d gone crazy. Joyce was on the verge of drowning in her memories when Will tugged on her sleeve. He looked at her with wide brown eyes and a nervous smile.

“Mom, you okay?” He asked.

Joyce nodded, “I am. I’m ok. Now come on, we’ve got decorations to buy.”

Later that night, The Byers-Hopper household was a hub of activity. Apparently just a family decorating night had turned into everyone coming to the Byers-Hopper house to decorate, eat, and be merry. Hopper, Jonathan and Steve had all helped bring in the tree and set it up. The younger boys immediately starting stringing the lights up, debating amongst themselves the best way to do it and what looked best. Nancy and Eleven were hanging ornaments, and Max was in control of the music making sure everyone was able to dance and sing. Joyce was leaning against the kitchen door-frame, looking out at all the people in her house.

“Steve I swear to God; you have to do it from the bottom up. And tuck the wires! Tuck!”

“I got it! I got it! El pass the ornament hooks.”

“Hey Jonathan, where did mom put the star?”

“Max, play the Hawaii song!”

“Mike oh my God stop dropping ornaments!”

Joyce couldn’t help but grin at the gaggle of teens and college kids arguing and dancing in her living room. It was all that she wanted. It was all that she needed for Christmas. “Hey, whatcha doin’?” Hop asked from behind her.

Joyce leaned back into him and smiled, "Watching."

"Come on, I wanna show you somethin'." Hop told her earnestly. He tugged softly on her arm, pulling her out of the kitchen doorway. He led her through the back-door of the kitchen and onto their back porch. Lights had been hung off the porch rails, the candles on the porch table were lit, and Andy Williams was singing over the radio.

"Oh Hop, it's beautiful." Joyce breathed. "I love this song."

"Me too." He led her to the middle of the porch and held her by the waist. "I told you we'd dance."

"You did."

They fell into a slow rhythm, swaying to "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," and passing a cigarette back a forth. It was peaceful, it was calm. The lights were perfect. They were the clear kind that twinkled in the darkness. They cast a serene glow over the porch, creating beauty and warmth. It made Joyce's heart swell just thinking about the thought that Jim had put into all of this. "Thank you, Jim." Joyce whispered.

"Anything for my girl." He leaned down and kissed the top of her head, and Joyce hummed in response. They stayed like that for a while, swaying and smoking and enjoying the closeness. But, eventually the cold set in and Jim's teeth were chattering.

"Let's go inside, I hope the kids haven't wrecked the house yet." Joyce joked.

"Ha, ha."

Joyce headed back into the kitchen to see if the kids wanted any food, but they were all passed out in the floor or on the couch. Jonathan and Nancy had fallen asleep beside each other on the floor, Eleven and Max were sprawled on the couch, Dustin and Lucas had argued over the Lazy-boy before agreeing to share it, Steve had taken a corner beside the tree curled up like a cat, Will was leaning against the side of the lazy-boy, and Mike was asleep on the floor beside the couch Eleven's hand entwined with his.

“So do they want any food or-“ Hopper stopped when he saw the living room. He sighed and flicked off the living room lights. “I’ll start making phone calls.” He walked back into their kitchen and grabbed their phone, ready to alert the worried parents that their kid was safe and sound and asleep.

Joyce watched as all the kids were sound asleep, bathed in the soft light of the Christmas tree. It was beautiful to her, having both her sons, her adopted daughter and all their friends happily sleeping in her living room. For once, they were all gathered without fear of immediate danger. There were no monsters or missing kids, it was just some friends, celebrating Christmas. Huh, Joyce thought, the lights aren’t so horrible after all. She looked back at Will’s sleeping face, illuminated perfectly by the tree.

Yeah, she decided, they’re not.